

CURRENT SUPPORT BRIEF

SHORT DISTANCE TRANSPORT DRIVE IN COMMUNIST CHINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SHORT DISTANCE TRANSPORT DRIVE IN COMMUNIST CHINA

To supplement the modern transportation sector, where there have been substantial improvements since 1949, and to provide feeder service to it, Communist China relies heavily on "primitive" transport. This term is applied to all forms of surface movement other than modern railroads, modern shipping, and motor transport. These junks, carts, porters, and small local improvised railways provide an indispensable link between producing or consuming areas and the modern transport system.

During 1958 the modern transport system of Communist China was barely adequate to support the modern sector of the economy. To compensate partially for insufficient capacity, great hordes of people were organized in late 1958 for "shock transport;" they employed almost every conceivable means to move goods awaiting transport. The authorities reported that an estimated 30 percent of the agricultural labor force and from 30 to 70 percent of that part of the labor force which was thrown into the mass iron and steel drive were engaged in the movement of material. 1/ This "rounding up" of people for transport work created a good deal of chaos and resulted in a substantial waste of labor during the fourth quarter of 1958. Realizing this, the Communists have attempted to prevent a similar condition during 1959.

A steady stream of directives and political exhortations in 1959 pointed to the importance of "short distance" transport. While the Chinese Communists are not clear in their definition of the term, "short distance" apparently applies primarily to primitive transport. Wang Shou-tao, Minister of Communications, said in May 1959 that the manpower situation in rural areas was "comprehensively insufficient" and that old-style transport facilities were not meeting the increased demand. He said that the problems of short distance transport were frequently neglected by the people with the result that this segment had become a weak link in the entire transportation chain. Short distance transport would account for two-thirds of the total amount of cargo to be handled on the entire transportation system during 1959, he continued, and because of the material and technological limitations on modern transport, it was necessary to economize manpower and raise the efficiency of primitive transport. 2/

Following an article in the leading theoretical journal, Red Flag in September 1959 urging the communes to organize and administer transport teams, 3/ the importance attached to the campaign was emphasized by a directive issued by the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council. This directive stated that transport tasks were "extremely strenuous" and that it would be impossible to move the enormous amounts of freight required by depending solely on existing facilities. The directive argued that it was necessary to organize and mobilize the masses; to utilize the slack time of agricultural workers; to make a clear division of labor between agricultural and transport workers; to allow the Communist Party to direct over-all plans and coordinate the use of manpower; and to give prime consideration to moving coal, mineral ores, pig iron, timber, grain, and materials for capital construction. The directive also advocated an adequate system of awards and increased food rations to stimulate the people to participate in this drive. 4/ In October, Po I-po, one of the regime's planning chieftains, said that "strengthening of transportation work, especially the satisfactory

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handling of short distance transportation work, was a key problem on the current economic front." 5/ At the same time, Wang Shou-tao stated that, although a great deal had been accomplished, "communications and transportation facilities, especially those for short distance transportation, were still unable to meet the needs of continued leap forward in industrial and agricultural production." 6/ By November, the Chinese announced that about 7,000,000 persons, 3,500,000 primitive vehicles, 500,000 vessels, and 500,000 draft animals had been mobilized for short distance transport. 7/

The amount of goods transported by primitive means in Communist China during 1959 increased over that transported in 1958. Peiping says that the volume of freight carried by "short distance" transport increased by 74 percent last year. 8/

Still heavily dependent on primitive transport, the Chinese are attempting to increase labor productivity in this sector. To this end, they are: (1) extending administrative control through the commune organization and the party apparatus, (2) using political exhortations to build up enthusiasm, (3) using increased food and wages as incentives to transport workers, (4) attempting to coordinate agricultural and transport labor thus creating a clearer division of labor, and (5) increasing efficiency through substitution of carts for shoulder poles, and the like. The Communists claim that, in November 1959 compared to November 1958, these measures resulted in a volume of freight one-third greater being moved with half the labor force. 9/

The nature of primitive transportation in Communist China appears to preclude any large increases in labor productivity. Yet the Chinese are becoming more aware of its importance to the economy and also of the tremendous labor costs involved, especially during periods when agriculture, water conservancy, and the like are making heavy demands on the labor force. China will continue to rely heavily on manpower to compensate partially for the lack of modern transport facilities for some time to come and will continue attempting to raise productivity by increasing worker enthusiasm and building more efficient carts and small boats.

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Sources:

1. CIA. FDD Summary no 2107, 23 Mar 59, p. 108-109. OFF USE.

2.

3. United States Joint Publications Research Service. JPRS
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5.

6. Ibid.

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